

APPENDIX 2

Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee Consideration of an Ecological Emergency



Report of Corporate Management Team

Paul Darby, Corporate Director of Resources

**Councillor Bev Coult Chair of Environment and Sustainable
Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide Cabinet with the conclusion of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee's (ESC OSC) review, considering evidence on various key habitats and species in the county, to determine, whether Overview and Scrutiny recommends to Cabinet, that Durham County Council (DCC) declares an ecological emergency in County Durham.

Executive summary

- 2 Cabinet at its meeting on the 13 October 2021, considered a report on the international and national declines in natural habitats and species. The report requested that scrutiny undertake a review and that an initial report came back to Cabinet within six months, making a recommendation in relation to a declaration of an ecological emergency.
- 3 The ESC OSC agreed at its meeting on the 24 November 2021 to add this review activity to its current work programme and that two special meetings of the committee would be held where members would be provided with evidence of biodiversity decline at an international, national, regional and local level.

- 4 Members were informed at the special meeting of the committee held on the 13 December 2021 that DCC and partners are already undertaking a significant amount of work to restore and protect wildlife and habitats with work taking place in the county to restore the County Durham coastline, which has been transformed as part of the Heritage Coast Initiative. The Turning the Tide partnership programme consisted of over a hundred projects delivered along the Heritage Coast. The Durham Coast hosts 92% of the total area of para-maritime Magnesian Limestone grassland habitat in Britain and the Turning the Tide Partnership has recovered over 225ha of land for habitat creation. Such has been the success of the programme that much of the area has subsequently been designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserves.
- 5 At the special meeting of the ESC OSC held on the 14 February members considered a very detailed report from the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change providing global, national and local data identifying biodiversity declines in various habitats and species across the county including birds, mammals, herptiles, insects and fish. A copy of the detailed report from the Service Grouping is attached as appendix 2.
- 6 The report states that local data for our terrestrial and aquatic habitats clearly shows that across-the-board semi-natural habitats are failing to meet condition assessments and targets with 85% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in unfavourable condition, 70% of Local Wildlife Sites compartments failing condition assessments, 90.6% of surface waters failing to meet the required standards and the risks of failure to meet management objectives for salmon on our rivers are increasing. Our semi-natural habitats are clearly under significant pressure and this represents a substantial impact on our biodiversity.
- 7 The loss or poor condition of habitats will impact negatively on local species. The local evidence across the species groups shows that the national picture of decline for priority species is echoed at a local level. The trend statements within the various species atlases show declines in farmland, upland, woodland, urban and garden birds, a decline in herptiles, a decline in mammals (clear information provided for only five species of mammals), a decline in five of the seven species of butterflies recorded in the relevant atlas and extinction or significant decline in bumblebee species at a local level.
- 8 The committee has also received information and data from key partners with the Chair of the Ecological Emergency Workstream and Director of the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership attending the meeting on the 14 February 2022.
- 9 It was highlighted by the Chair that a lot of work is ongoing in County Durham to promote nature recovery including:

- (a) the restoration of 12 miles of unique coast with a 160 hectares of grassland habitat managed for nature conservation, extending habitat restoration into the marine environment.
- (b) Farming in protected landscapes with likely investment of £1m in the section of the North Pennines AONB falling within the county boundary in the next two years together with river restoration, walls and hedges, grassland restoration and public access.
- (c) The Tees-Swale naturally connected project which puts farmers at the heart of nature recovery and nature recovery at the heart of farming in Teesdale and Swaledale. The project includes restoration of peatland and hay meadows, and the creation of at least 40 small wetlands, planting of 200,000 trees, improvements to water quality in 200km of watercourses and improved fish passage and habitat on the river Greta.
- (d) DCC Biodiversity Enhancement Project, enhancing council-owned greenspaces with 41 hectares converted to species rich grassland.
- (e) The North Pennines AONB team has led the restoration of 16,000 hectares of peatland within County Durham avoiding carbon loss and has major benefits for biodiversity.
- (f) The Tees and Wear River Trusts are promoting good soil management, metal mine pollution remediation, coolwaters tree planting, tackling invasive and non-native species and agricultural diffuse pollution.
- (g) Durham Wildlife Trust led projects including Heart of Durham, Discover Brightwater, Naturally Native and in addition manage 27 nature reserves in the county.
- (h) Expanding tree and woodland cover with multiple partners focused on expansion of tree and scrub cover, DCC led planting of one million trees & 200 miles of hedgerow in the last 20 years, Durham Woodland Revival, Urban Tree Challenge Fund, Durham Woodland Creation Programme, North East Community Forest and Trees Call for Action.
- (i) Work undertaken in training to develop the skills to support nature and people including farmer/conservationist knowledge-exchange, farmer-led habitat assessment, contractor training and volunteer training.

10 The Chair of Partnership Workstream also highlighted that, although a lot of significant work is being undertaken, there is evidence of significant biodiversity decline including a decline of 60% in the swift population, a 34% decline in the swallow population, a 97% decline in

the water vole population, a 54% decline in farmland birds and that 29% of our bird species appear on the red list of concern, with species on the list including the house sparrow and the starling. In conclusion he commented that we are in an ecological emergency and that there has been a catastrophic decline in nature resulting in an ecological crisis.

- 11 At the special meeting of the ESC OSC held on the 14 February having considered the information provided in the detailed report and supporting presentation from the Service Grouping, together with the additional detail provided in presentations from key partners, members were asked to consider their recommendation to Cabinet concerning declaration.
- 12 Those members present at the meeting unanimously agreed that the ESC OSC recommend to Cabinet that DCC declares an ecological emergency. Members also agreed that further additional recommendations would be made to Cabinet in relation to:
 - (a) The need for Durham County Council to develop an Ecological Emergency Response Plan to address both how the council will revise its own practices, and also how it will work with the wider community to tackle the ecological emergency. In order to produce the plan, a cross service review would need to be undertaken to identify actions (with associated costs) and targets, a similar process that was undertaken in relation to the development of the Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP)).
 - (b) The plan once produced would be a standalone plan initially and then over time, as the plan develops, it would be merged with the Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP).
 - (c) The need to ensure that best ecological practice is integrated across all Council services with consideration given to the inclusion of ecology on the implications sheet for all DCC committee reports as is the current practice for climate change.
 - (d) The need to ensure that the committee receives regular updates on the development of the plan and once developed, monitors the progress of the plan against the actions and targets in the plan, on a regular basis.
- 13 In addition, at the special meeting held on the 14 February 2022 members of the committee were made aware of two questions received from a member of the public asking that the committee consider making a further recommendation to Cabinet in relation to raising awareness of biodiversity decline in County Durham and to ensure that community and special interest groups and interested individuals, are included in consultation arrangements for the development of the plan and also in the resulting delivery of the plan. It was agreed by members that a further recommendation would be included in the report to Cabinet and that in addition, the recommendation should also highlight the need to

promote activities undertaken in the county by DCC and partners to tackle this issue with a view to educating local communities.

- 14 It is recognised that the action plan, when produced, will need to be subject to financial assessment including the development of the appropriate business cases and affordability tests.
- 15 In addition, County Council on 23 February 2022, agreed the Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/2023 to 2025/2026 and Revenue and Capital Budget for 2022/2023 which included additional investment in front line services for extra resource including Nature Reserves.

Recommendation(s)

- 16 That Cabinet notes the report of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 17 That Cabinet considers whether to formally declare an ecological emergency.
- 18 That Cabinet, should it declare an ecological emergency, also considers the following additional recommendations:
 - (a) That Durham County Council develops an Ecological Emergency Response Plan to address both how the council will revise its own practices, and also how it will work with the wider community to tackle the ecological emergency. Producing the Ecological Emergency Response Plan will involve conducting a fully detailed cross service review to identify actions (with associated costs) and targets to be undertaken by DCC with relevant partners (a similar process was undertaken in relation to the development of the Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP)).
 - (b) That the Ecological Emergency Response Plan is a standalone plan initially, and then over time as it develops, is merged with the Climate Emergency Response Plan.
 - (c) To progress the development of the plan, Cabinet ensures that best ecological practice is integrated across all Council services and in doing so considers the inclusion of ecology in the implications sheet that accompanies all DCC committee reports.
 - (d) When declaring an ecological emergency, the need for engagement and consultation should be articulated and request that the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change:
 - i. Raise awareness of biodiversity decline in County Durham and promote various educational activities undertaken by DCC, partners and community groups to tackle this issue.

- ii. Ensure engagement with community and special interest groups and interested individuals, as part of any consultation arrangements and in relation to the future development and delivery of the action plan.
- (e) That the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee receives regular updates on the progression of the plan and once developed, monitors progress against the actions and targets contained in the plan, on a regular basis.
- (f) That the review of the progress made against the recommendations contained in this report will be undertaken six months after the report is considered by Cabinet.

Background

- 19 Currently a considerable amount of time and resource is directed towards nature conservation in County Durham with public, private and charitable sectors all engaged with organisations such as Durham Wildlife Trust leading projects to reverse the declines in small pearl-bordered fritillary and water vole populations and is undertaking landscape scale wetland restoration as part of the Discover Brightwater programme. The North Pennines AONB team has already led the restoration of 16,000ha of peatland within County Durham and are progressing with their Tees-Swale naturally connected project which will create hay meadows, wetlands, woodland and manage over 2,000ha of rush pasture within Teesdale and Swaledale. In addition, organisations such as Northumbrian Water Limited and the Environment Agency are all engaged with projects to restore and enhance our environment.
- 20 In addition, DCC and partners are also undertaking a significant amount of work to restore and protect wildlife and habitats with work taking place in the county to restore the County Durham coastline, which has been transformed as part of the Heritage Coast Initiative. The Turning the Tide partnership programme consisted of over a hundred projects delivered along the Heritage Coast. The Durham Coast hosts 92% of the total area of para-maritime Magnesian Limestone grassland habitat in Britain and the Turning the Tide Partnership has recovered over 225ha of land for habitat creation. Such has been the success of the programme that much of the area has subsequently been designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserves.
- 21 At its meeting on 13 October 2021, Cabinet received a report on consideration of an ecological emergency which recognised work undertaken to restore the County Durham environment providing detail of various projects undertaken in the county including the success of the Turning the Tide Partnership Programme. The report requested that Scrutiny include within its current work programme a review to examine and consider the evidence base relating to the decline in natural habitats in County Durham and that an initial report came back to Cabinet within six months making a recommendation in relation to declaration.
- 22 The Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to include this work within its work programme at its meeting on 24 November 2021. The committee further agreed that because of the urgency of this work it would consider the evidence if an ecological emergency should be declared in County Durham over two special meetings of the committee, taking place on 13 December 2021 and 14 February 2022.

- 23 The Committee has received global, national, regional and local data from Durham County Council's Head of Environment, the Principal Ecologist at both meetings, with a detail report summarising information provided at the meeting on the 13 December together with additional information considered by members at the meeting on the 14 February 2022. A copy of the detailed report from the Service Grouping is attached as appendix 2.
- 24 Whilst the global and national data is robust, there are some issues with regard to local data and its ability to show clear trends over the same time periods as used by national reports. These limitations have been borne out during conversations with local, regional and national organisations. The general view of the data is that at a national level it is robust but as you bear down to a regional and local level data the picture becomes less clear and more ambiguous. The main reason for the limitations of local species data is the lack of time-series datasets which allow trends to be confidently identified. The data varies from species to species with some clear trends not available at the local level. However, local data on salmonids, birds, bumblebees, reptiles and butterflies provide a good degree of confidence in the trends exhibited. While some of the data has obvious limitations it is still useful when examined in light of the recognised global and national declines.
- 25 The report states that local data for our terrestrial and aquatic habitats clearly shows that across-the-board semi-natural habitats are failing to meet condition assessments and targets with 85% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in unfavourable condition, 70% of Local Wildlife Sites compartments failing condition assessments, 90.6% of surface waters failing to meet the required standards and the risks of failure to meet management objectives for Salmon on our rivers are increasing. Our semi-natural habitats are clearly under significant pressure and this represents a substantial impact on our biodiversity.
- 26 The loss of, or poor condition of habitats will impact negatively on local species. The local evidence across the species groups shows that the national picture of decline for priority species is echoed at a local level. The trend statements within the various species atlases presents a poor picture. Both the Atlas for Farmland and Upland Birds and the Atlas for Woodland and Urban and Garden Birds show declines. Other records also indicate that all reptile species are declining and our only European protected amphibian (the great crested newt) is in decline. Of the 20 mammals listed in the Durham Biodiversity Action Plan, clear information is only available for five species. Four of these five have suffered a decline or extinction with only the otter returning to former numbers enjoyed in the mid-20th century. There has also been a decline in five of the seven species of butterflies recorded in the relevant atlas and extinction or significant decline in bumblebee species at a local level.

- 27 The committee has also received information and data from key partners with the Chair of the Ecological Emergency Workstream of the Environment and Climate Change Partnership and Director of the North Pennines AONB Partnership attending the meeting on the 14 February 2022.
- 28 It was highlighted by the Chair of the Ecological Emergency Workstream of the Environment and Climate Change Partnership and the Director of the North Pennines AONB that a lot of work is ongoing in County Durham to promote nature recovery including:
- (a) the restoration of 12 miles of unique coast with a 160 hectares of grassland habitat managed for nature conservation, extending habitat restoration into the marine environment.
 - (b) Farming in protected landscapes with likely investment of £1m in the Durham part of the North Pennines AONB in the next two years together with river restoration, walls and hedges, grassland restoration and public access.
 - (c) The Tees-Swale naturally connected project which puts farmers at the heart of nature recovery and nature recovery at the heart of farming in Teesdale and Swaledale. The project includes restoring peatland, hay meadows, create at least 40 small wetlands, establish 200,000 trees, improve water quality in 200km of watercourses and improve fish passage and habitat on the Greta.
 - (d) DCC Biodiversity Enhancement Project, enhancing council-owned greenspaces with 41 hectares converted to species rich grassland.
 - (e) The North Pennines AONB team has led the restoration of 16,000 hectares of peatland within County Durham avoiding carbon loss and has major benefits for biodiversity.
 - (f) The Tees and Wear River Trusts are promoting good soil management, metal mine pollution remediation, coolwaters tree planting, tackling invasive and non-native species and agricultural diffuse pollution.
 - (g) Durham Wildlife Trust led projects including Heart of Durham, Discover Brightwater, Naturally Native and in addition manage 27 nature reserves in the county.
 - (h) Expanding tree and woodland cover with multiple partners focused on expansion of tree and scrub cover, DCC led planting of million trees & 200 miles of hedgerow in the last 20 years, Durham Woodland Revival, Urban Tree Challenge Fund, Durham

Woodland Creation Programme, North East Community Forest and Trees Call for Action.

- (i) Work undertaken in relation to training to develop the skills to support nature and people including farmer/conservationist knowledge-exchange, Farmer-led habitat assessment, contactor training and volunteer training.

- 29 It was then highlighted by the Chair of Partnership Workstream and Director of the North Pennines AONB that, although a lot of significant work is being undertaken, there is evidence of significant biodiversity decline including a decline of 60% in the Swift population, a 34% decline in the Swallow population, a 97% decline in the Water Vole population, a 54% decline in Farmland Birds and that 29% of our bird species appear on the red list of concern, with species on the list including the House Sparrow and Starlings. In conclusion he commented that we are in an ecological emergency and that there has been a catastrophic decline in nature resulting in an ecological crisis.

- 30 While many English Councils have declared a climate emergency there are far fewer that have declared an ecological emergency. As of June 2021, 123 of the 149 other single and upper tier local authorities in England have declared a climate emergency compared with 22 that have declared some kind of ecological emergency. Some councils have declared a combined climate and ecological emergency such as Brighton and Hove back in 2018 and were followed by others that include Cambridgeshire, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole; Windsor and Maidenhead; Brent and Ealing. The councils that have declared a stand-alone ecological emergency include Herefordshire, Dorset, Bath and North East Somerset; and Bristol. Whilst most of the local authorities in the North East of England have declared a climate emergency none have yet declared an ecological emergency making Durham County Council the first local authority in the area to declare should they choose to do so.

- 31 At the special meeting of the ESC OSC held on the 14 February having considered the information provided in the detailed report and supporting presentation from the Service Grouping, together with the additional detail provided in presentations from key partners, members were asked to consider their recommendation to Cabinet concerning declaration.

- 32 Those members present at the meeting unanimously agreed that the ESC OSC recommend to Cabinet that DCC declares an ecological emergency. Members also agreed that further additional recommendations would be made to Cabinet in relation to:
 - (a) The need for Durham County Council to develop an Ecological Emergency Response Plan to address both how the council will

revise its own practices, and also how it will work with the wider community to tackle the ecological emergency. In order to produce the plan, a cross service review would need to be undertaken to identify actions (with associated costs) and targets, a similar process that was undertaken in relation to the development of the Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP)).

- (b) The plan once produced would be a standalone plan initially and then over time, as the plan develops, it would be merged with the Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP).
- (c) The need to ensure that best ecological practice is integrated across all Council services with consideration given to the inclusion of ecology on the implications sheet for all DCC committee reports as is the current practice for climate change.
- (d) The need to ensure that the committee receives regular updates on the development of the plan and once developed, monitors the progress of the plan against the actions and targets in the plan, on a regular basis.

33 In addition, at the special meeting held on the 14 February 2022 members of the committee were made aware of two questions received from a member of the public asking that the committee consider making a further recommendation to Cabinet in relation to raising awareness of biodiversity decline in County Durham and to ensure that community and special interest groups and interested individuals, are included in consultation arrangements for the development of the plan and also in the resulting delivery of the plan. It was agreed by members that a further recommendation would be included in the report to Cabinet and that in addition, the recommendation should also highlight the need to promote activities undertaken in the county by DCC and partners to tackle this issue with a view to educating local communities.

34 It is recognised that the action plan, when produced, will need to be subject to financial assessment including the development of the appropriate business cases and affordability tests.

35 In addition, County Council on 23 February 2022, agreed the Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/2023 to 2025/2026 and Revenue and Capital Budget for 2022/2023 which included additional investment in front line services for extra resource including Nature Reserves.

Conclusion

36 Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee unanimously agreed to recommend that DCC declares an ecological emergency and in addition to recommending declaration, the committee has made further additional recommendations for Cabinet to consider.

Background papers

- County Council 23 February 2022 [Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/2023 to 2025/2026 and Revenue and Capital Budget 2022/2023](#)

Other useful documents

- None

Contact: Ann Whitton

Tel: 03000 268143

Diane Close

Tel: 03000 268140

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

None

Finance

A fully costed action plan will need to be developed to tackle the ecological emergency. MTFP12 contains bids for additional resources for woodland protection, local nature recovery strategy and countryside estates management.

Consultation

None

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None

Human Rights

None

Climate Change

There is a clear link between climate change and the decline in biodiversity which will be addressed in the full review report.

Crime and Disorder

None

Staffing

Bids to fund additional posts in local nature recovery, woodlands protection and countryside estates management are contained within MTFP12.

Accommodation

None

Risk

There is a need to consider, when developing the ecological emergency action plan that it is balanced in relation to regeneration opportunities in the county.

Procurement

None

Appendix 2

Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

14 February 2022

Consideration of An Ecological Emergency (County Durham)



Report of Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of the report is to provide further information to the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to assist members in determining, as to whether they recommend to Cabinet, that Durham County Council declares an Ecological Emergency.

Executive summary

- 2 At a meeting of Cabinet Meeting held on the 13 October 2021, the national and international declines in natural habitats and species were recognised and it was requested that a focused piece of work be undertaken by Overview and Scrutiny to examine the evidence base for biodiversity declines within County Durham. This report together with information provided to the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (ESCOC) at a special meeting held on the 13 December 2021 provides the evidence base for the ESCOC to make a determination as to whether Durham County Council should declare an ecological emergency.
- 3 In 2019 Durham County Council declared a climate emergency. The climate change emergency recognised the global climate emergency, and the Council made a commitment to address the issue of climate change at a local level to assist in dealing with an international crisis. It

is in a similar spirit that this report examines the evidence for a biodiversity crisis at a global, national and local level.

- 4 While the global and national data are robust there are some limitations with regards to local data and its ability to show clear trends over the same time periods as used by the national reports. The general view of the data is that at a national level it are robust but as you bear down on regional and local data the picture becomes less clear. The main reason for the limitations of local species data is the lack of time-series datasets.
- 5 The most robust data we have relates to the condition of designated sites and Environment Agency data on the condition of surface waters (rivers and streams) and there is high confidence in the data used within this report.
- 6 The species data varies in its ability to provide robust trends. Data on most of the species' groups provide a good degree of confidence in the trends exhibited. Although regular time series data is not always available, the data pertaining to many species has been analysed by local experts during the production of Atlases describing the fauna of County Durham. These Atlases provide the basis for reporting against species in this report.
- 7 Any assessment of the status of biodiversity within a given geographical area is not straightforward, whether at a global, national or local level. Within any area some of the many thousands of species will show population and distributional increases while others will decline, and new species will colonise as others go extinct. Within County Durham species such as buzzard are currently spreading eastwards and the red kite was re-introduced in the early 2000's bolstering our avian fauna, while a suite of other birds is in decline. Tree bumblebees colonised the county in 2010 increasing the numbers of resident bumblebees, yet other species have previously become extinct. The Brown Argus is colonising from the south adding to our diversity of butterflies yet at the same time this puts the Northern Brown Argus under threat due to interbreeding with the new arrival.
- 8 Biological diversity is a multifaceted concept and includes not only species richness but the functionality of the ecological systems within which species exist. These Ecosystems underpin all human life and activities. The goods and services they provide are vital to sustaining well-being, and to future economic and social development. The benefits ecosystems provide include food, water, timber, air purification, soil formation and pollination. These wider interactions are challenging to measure and so species data are taken as an indicator of the wider health of the environment.

- 9 This report concentrates on species data pertaining to Durham Biodiversity Action Plan¹ species. All the national State of Nature Reports from 2013 onwards have assessed UK Priority Species and this report follows suit. Many Priority Species are habitat specialists² which rely on high quality semi-natural habitats and so they are good indicators of the overall health of our habitats. Priority species are often subject to more intensive monitoring and recording and therefore more data is available.
- 10 This report examines readily available data with a view to determining whether the evidence indicates that County Durham is mirroring the declines shown within national datasets or has escaped significant damage to its biodiversity.
- 11 A presentation will be provided highlighting to members loss of habitats and species in County Durham. In addition, partners will be in attendance at the meeting, the Chair of the Environment and Climate Change Partnership and Director of Durham Wildlife Trust and the Chair of the Ecological Emergency Workstream of the Partnership and Director of the North Pennines AONB Partnership to share their thoughts on biodiversity decline in the county.

Recommendations

- 12 That Members of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider the information provided in the report and presentation.

Global Data

- 13 As stated in the preceding section Durham County Council recognises the global decline in species and habitats. A brief outline of the global situation is provided here to provide wider context for the ESCOC.
- 14 The main source of global data is The Living Planet Index (LPI); a measure of the state of the world's biological diversity based on population trends of vertebrate species from terrestrial, freshwater and marine habitats.
- 15 The LPI tracks the abundance of almost 21,000 populations of mammals, birds, fish, reptiles and amphibians around the world and uses data from over 4,000 sources. The LPI is the indicator adopted by the Convention on Biological Diversity³ with regards to its target to 'take effective and urgent action to halt the loss of biodiversity'.

¹ BAPs are plans developed to protect and enhance biodiversity, the Durham BAP identified local priority habitats and species.

² Species strongly associated with high quality semi-natural habitats (e.g., magnesian limestone grassland) compared to more generalist species found in semi-natural habitats and the wider landscape (e.g., agricultural and garden habitats)

³ The Convention on Biological Diversity is the international legal instrument for "the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources" that has been ratified by 196 nations.

- 16 Key headlines from the 2020 Living Planet Index Report:
- Average 68% decrease in population sizes of mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles and fish between 1970 and 2016.
 - Average 84% decrease in freshwater species between 1970 and 2016.
 - European grassland butterflies: 1990 to 2017 The abundance of 17 grassland butterfly species declined by 49% on average.
 - More than 85% of the area of wetlands has been lost.
- 17 The LPI refers to other indices which can provide further insights into the plight of biodiversity at a global level.
- IUCN⁴ Red List Index. Represents the most comprehensive and objective system for assessing the relative risk of extinction of species. The current species extinction rate is estimated to be between 1,000 and 10,000 times higher than the natural or 'background' rate. The total number of known threatened animal species has increased from 5,205 to 8,462 since 1996. One in four mammals and one in eight birds face a high risk of extinction in the near future.
 - The Mean Species Abundance (MSA) Index and Biodiversity Intactness Index. These provide an indication of the functionality of ecosystems; both these indices have fallen to 66% and 79% respectively and are predicted to continue to decline.
 - The Species Habitat Index. This index provides information on the distribution of species and shows that the geographic distribution of terrestrial mammals, the only group for which baseline distribution could be estimated, has been reduced to 83% of pre-impact values.
- 18 The 2020 Living Planet Index Report can be found at:
<https://www.zsl.org/sites/default/files/LPR%202020%20Full%20report.pdf>

National Data

⁴ The International Union for Conservation of Nature is the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it

- 19 The County Council accepts the declines in biodiversity at a national level, and again headline information is provided within this report to offer wider context for the ESCOC.
- 20 The main source of information to evidence a national decline is the State of Nature Report 2019, which provides a collective government and non-profit organization statement on our biodiversity.
- 21 Key headlines from the State of Nature Report 2019:
- Since 1970 35% of species in England have undergone population declines
 - In 2016 the breeding woodland bird indicator for England was 24% lower than in 1970
 - Woodland butterflies' abundance has fallen by 58% since 1990
 - The UK Breeding Seabird Indicator shows a 22% decline in average abundance for 13 species between 1985 and 2015.
 - The state of Nature report provides two indicators relating to UK Priority Species⁵. The first of these is an indicator of abundance which shows that since 1970, the indicator of abundance for 214 priority species has declined by a statistically significant 60%.
 - The second indicator provides information on the changes for UK Priority Species distribution. Between 1970 and 2016, the index of distribution of priority species in the UK declined by 27%.

⁵ Species of greatest conservation concern; the UK's priority species

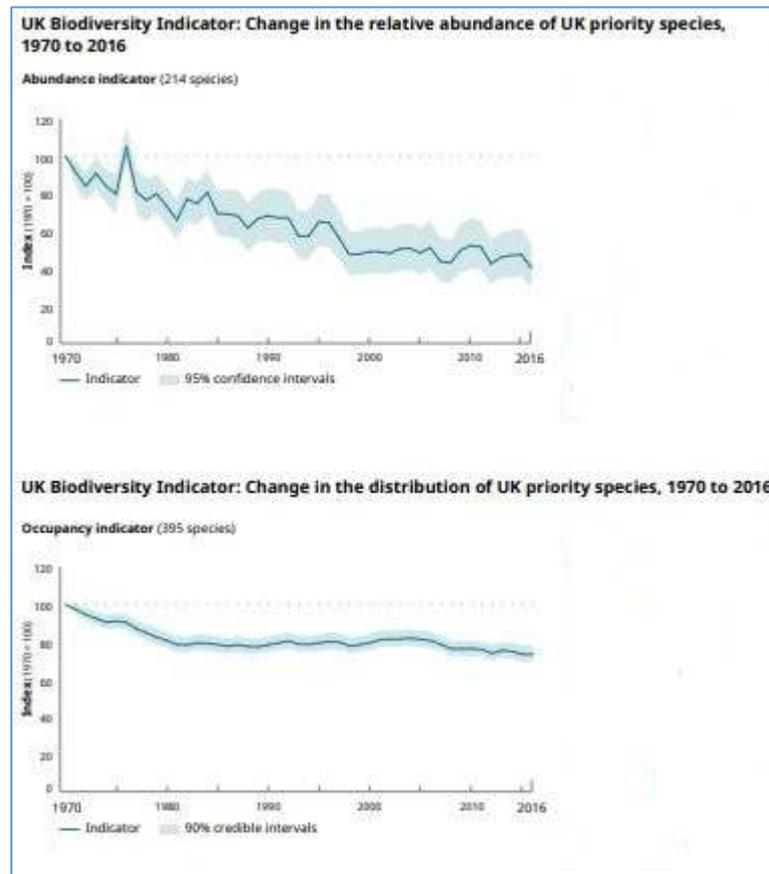


Chart 1: UK Biodiversity Indicators (Abundance & Distribution of Priority Species)

- 22 The 2019 State of Nature Report can be found at:
<https://nbn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/State-of-Nature-2019-UK-full-report.pdf>

LOCAL DATA

- 23 The first aspect of local data to be examined is the condition of our designated sites; these are monitored against agreed national standards for specific habitat types.
- 24 Two sets of data are presented here; the first refers to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), these are a formal conservation designation undertaken by Natural England. The second set of designated sites are Local Wildlife Sites (LWS). LWS are designated by Local Authorities across the UK for their local importance to biodiversity and contain priority habitats and species; they are regarded as a key component of our ecological network.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

- 25 Natural England monitors the SSSI within County Durham. The monitoring and assessment of SSSI is an important aspect of Natural

England's overall monitoring programme and provides evidence for the delivery of the Government's 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment.

- 26 There are 88 SSSI listed by Natural England in County Durham and the most recent data from Natural England's Designated Sites View website shows that 15% are in favourable condition with 85% in unfavourable condition in one of three categories.

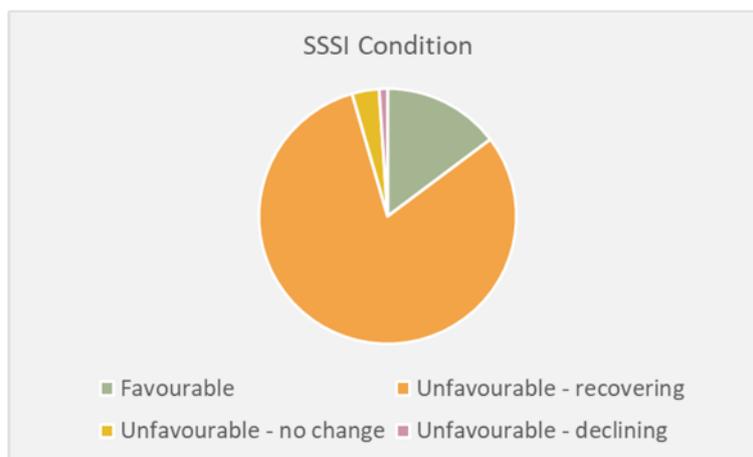


Chart 2: SSSI Condition.

- 27 The 25 Year Environment Plan Progress Report - April 2019 to March 2020 states that nationally 38.9% of SSSI are in favourable condition and that given these figures the Government "*...are not on track to meet our commitment to restore 75% of our one million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition*". The condition data for County Durham shows that our SSSI are in a poorer state than is evidenced nationally.

Local Wildlife Sites

- 28 There are 324 LWS in County Durham; since 2011 the authority has engaged Durham Wildlife Trust to re-survey the sites and to date 42% of sites have been surveyed providing a robust picture on the condition of our LWS network.
- 29 Most LWS are made up of compartments of different semi-natural habitat types. These range from ancient and wet woodlands, ponds and swamps to magnesian limestone and acidic grasslands. Data presented in Chart 3 below provides information on the condition of all the compartments making up the LWS network regardless of habitat type.

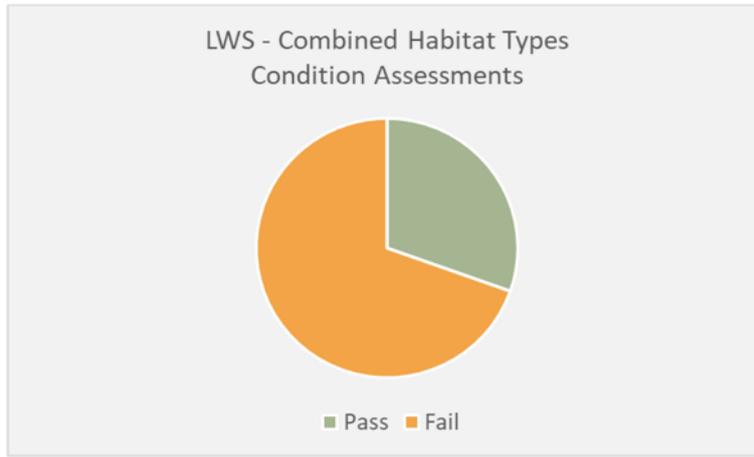


Chart 3: Condition of all compartments

30 The data shows that 70% of all the compartments within the re-surveyed LWS fail to pass the condition assessments. This data can be further broken down into broad habitat types: woodland, grassland, wetlands and heathland.



Chart 4: Condition of Woodland Compartments

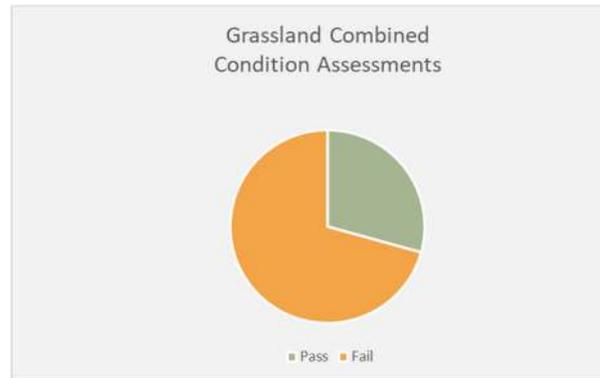


Chart 5: Condition of Grassland Compartments

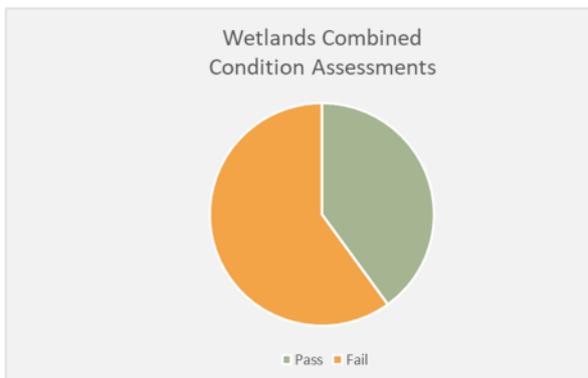


Chart 6: Condition of Wetland Compartments

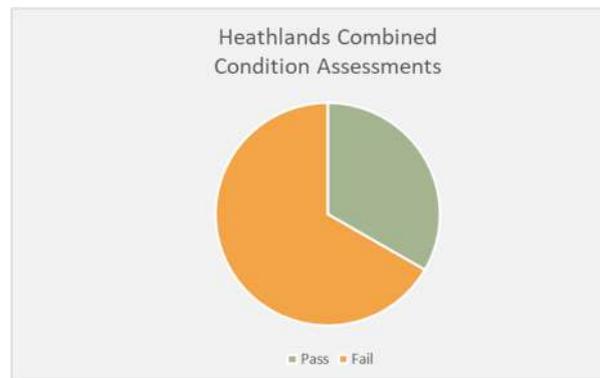
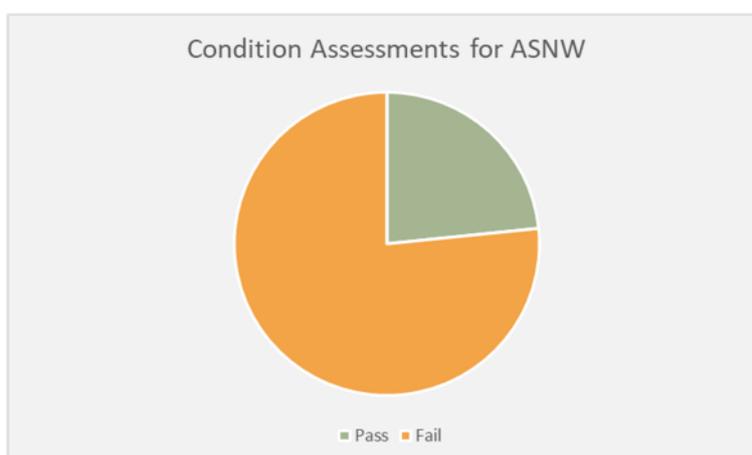


Chart 7: Condition of Heathland Compartments

- 31 The data for broad habitat types shows a similar picture with the percentage of habitat compartments in unfavourable condition ranging between 60% for wetlands up to 77% for woodlands; this shows that a significant proportion of all the habitat types represented within the LWS network are in poor condition.
- 32 The major reasons for a failure to meet condition criteria are the presence of invasive non-native species, a lack of management or inappropriate management. The LWS are obviously in decline as the management issues are on-going. A gradual decline in quality will eventually lead to sites no longer meeting designation criteria and them being removed from the LWS register as the habitat has been lost. Although there are no firm figures as yet, it is estimated that up to fourteen LWS may require de-designation or boundary changes due to habitat loss; this number will only increase in the future without intervention.

Ancient Woodlands

- 33 Ancient woodlands are represented within the LWS network and have been subject to condition assessments.
- 34 Ancient woods are areas of woodland that have persisted since 1600 and because of this longevity they are unique and complex communities of plants, fungi, insects and other microorganisms. Ancient woodlands are our richest and most complex terrestrial habitat and regarded as 'irreplaceable' by the National Planning Policy Framework. The Durham Wildlife Audit (1995) states that "*There has been a 25% loss of Durham's ancient woodlands since the 1920's*" and that this woodland type only occupies 1.3% of the County.
- 35 Ancient woodlands fall into two categories, the first of these are Ancient semi-natural woods (ASNW) which are woods that have developed naturally and have retained broadleaf woodland cover for over 400 years. ASNW are represented within the LWS network and the resurveys of LWS shows that 77% of the ASNW fail condition assessments.



- 36 The second category of ancient woodland are Plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS) which are ancient woods that have been felled and replanted with non-native species. Typically, these are conifers, but it can also include broadleaved planting such as beech, red oak, and sweet chestnut. Although they have the complex soil of ancient woodland and are considered to contain remnants of woodland specialist species they are regarded as being in poor condition relative to the ASNW.
- 37 Recent work on Green Infrastructure Mapping has provided data on the amount of our ancient woodlands that are categorised as PAWS; 63% of our ancient woodlands are poor condition PAWS sites.

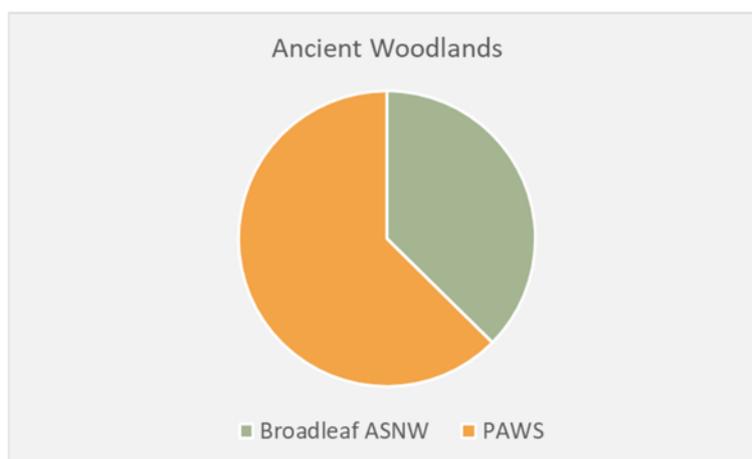


Chart 9: Ancient Woodlands - PAWS and ASNW

Woodland Functionality

- 38 The Green Infrastructure Mapping exercise has also provided information with regards to the functionality of our woodlands. The mapping process needed to identify our core areas of ecologically functioning woodland; core areas are defined as ASNW which are a minimum of 10ha in size, this alongside a 1km buffer zone⁶ identified our core network of functioning woodland. Using these criteria, it can be shown that most of our ASNW woodlands are not regarded as being fully functional with only 9% of ASNW meeting the size criteria.

⁶ Woodland size and buffer zones based on minimum patch size for specialist woodland species and a maximum dispersal distance of 1km (Generic Focal Species approach). This is a nationally recognised approach for mapping and spatially analysing habitats on a landscape scale.



Chart 10: Functional Woodlands

Water Framework Directive

- 39 The Environment Agency (EA) monitors the delivery of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) which was adopted by the UK in 2000 and imposes standards for the improvement of all aspects of water environments, including rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastal waters and groundwater. It requires surface waters to be of good quality by 2027.
- 40 The EA provides water classification data relating to obligations under the directive and part of this data is concerned with the ecological status of surface waters. The data places 64 surface waters in County Durham within status categories, the categories are Bad, Poor, Moderate, Good and High. In order for the obligations of the directive to be met surface waters should fall into the Good category. Data from 2015, 2016 and 2019 is currently available.
- 41 Taking the most recent data it can be seen that for the River Wear Catchment only 6% of watercourses in the catchment are in Good condition, the River Tees fairs a little better with 15% of watercourses being in Good condition.

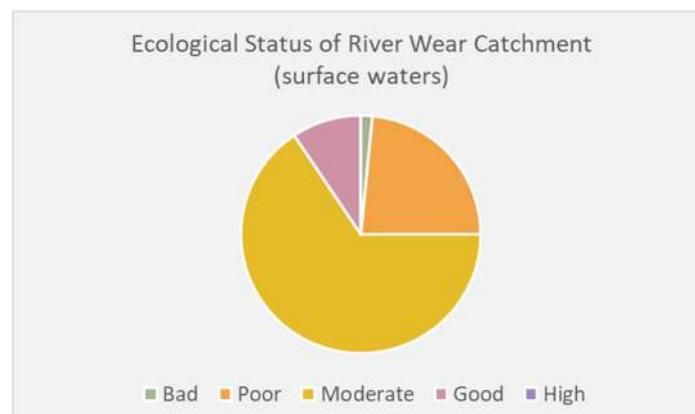


Chart 11: Ecological Status of River Wear watercourses

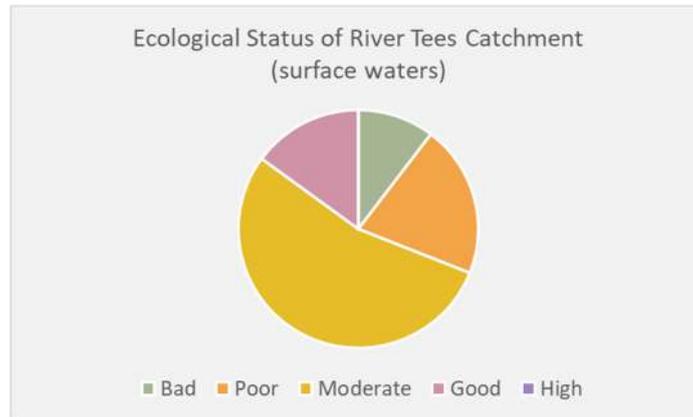


Chart 12: Ecological Status of River Tees watercourses

- 42 A comparison of the EA data for all watercourses in County Durham between 2015 and 2019 indicates that the ecological status of our watercourses appears to have further declined with a reduction in watercourses attaining Good status and an increase in those in Poor condition.

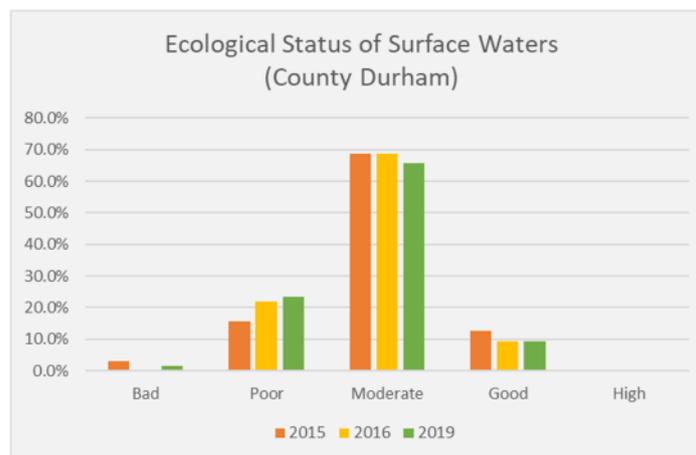


Chart 13: Ecological Status for surface waters in County Durham

Species

- 43 Information on species is mostly derived from species atlases, those referenced are:
- A Summer Atlas of the Breeding Birds of County Durham (2000)
 - The Birds of Durham (2012)
 - Mammals, Amphibians and Reptiles of the North East (2012)

- Atlas of the Butterflies of North East England (2014)
- Bumblebees of North East England (2019)

44 When looking at the data or statements arising from Atlases the reader should be aware of the publication dates and that statements extracted from the Atlases only apply up to the year of publication.

45 Information on salmon and sea trout has been gathered from Salmon Stocks and Fisheries in England and Wales in 2020 (Environment Agency) and EA data on River Wear and River Tees fish counts which is available up to 2021.

Birds

46 Two Publications are referenced in this report. The Birds of Durham (2012) which includes breeding and non-breeding birds and The Summer Atlas of the Breeding Birds of County Durham (2000) which deals with birds that breed in the County. The Atlas provides “guiding statement” trends for a range of Durham Biodiversity Action Plan (DBAP) species associated with different habitat types between 1985 and 1995.

47 These guiding statements provide a snapshot of population trends over a 10-year period and although, as the atlas states they are not definitive the statements do none the less give an indication as to the health of our breeding bird populations.

48 The Birds of Durham does not provide an equivalent to the guiding statements, but the detail held within the species accounts enables the reader to determine the local status of each species.

49 The Atlas statements for birds associated with the Durham Coast are relatively positive with only a handful of species showing any evidence of a potential decline.

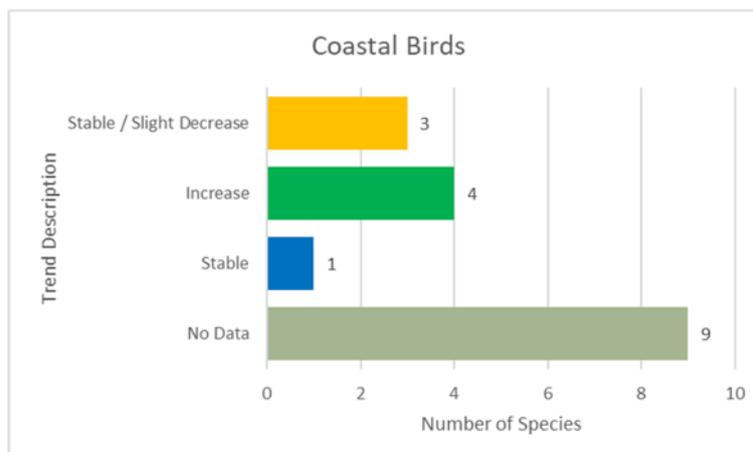


Chart 14: Guiding Statement Trends for Coastal Birds

- 50 The Atlas does not provide data on Turnstone and Purple Sandpiper as they are non-breeding birds. These medium-sized sandpipers of rocky shores and gravel beaches are qualifying features of the Northumbria Coast Special Protection Area (SPA)⁷, part of which lies along the Durham coast⁸ and so of interest in the context of this report.
- 51 The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBs) provides annual data for Turnstones counted within the Northumbria Coast SPA. The species shows a shallow increase in population up until the late 1980s/early 1990s, from which there has then been a steady decline. Further survey work reinforces the population declines, with a significant decline in counts of turnstones on the Northumbrian Coast SPA between the winters 1980/81 and 2014/15 (Mark Whittingham et. al. 2016). The national and regional turnstone populations show a similar trend, however the changes in counts were significantly slower than the more rapid declines in the Northumbrian Coast SPA.
- 52 The other species covered by the SPA, Purple Sandpiper, is regarded by The Birds of Durham as "*having declined in recent years*".
- 53 Two breeding species are listed on the SPA citation, Roseate Turn and Little Turn. According to the Atlas both these species show evidence of increases. The Birds of Durham note that the last time Roseate Turn tried (unsuccessfully) to breed in County Durham was in 1999 and it is an "*uncommon passage visitor*". The Little Turn has a precarious foothold in County Durham. The dunes at Crimdon have held a breeding colony and while efficient wardening has prevented part or total failure of the colony in recent years by minimising human impacts and predation, the small size of the colony makes it susceptible to impacts.
- 54 The trend statements within the Atlas for Farmland and Upland Birds indicate declines. Although some species of farmland birds show evidence of a slight increase in numbers, the overall picture is one of decline. Upland birds follow suit, with a concerning picture of decreases and potential declines.

⁷ Special Protection Area (SPA) are selected are selected to protect one or more rare, threatened or vulnerable bird species listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive

⁸ Between Seaham and Ryhope and between Crimdon Dene and Blackhall Colliery

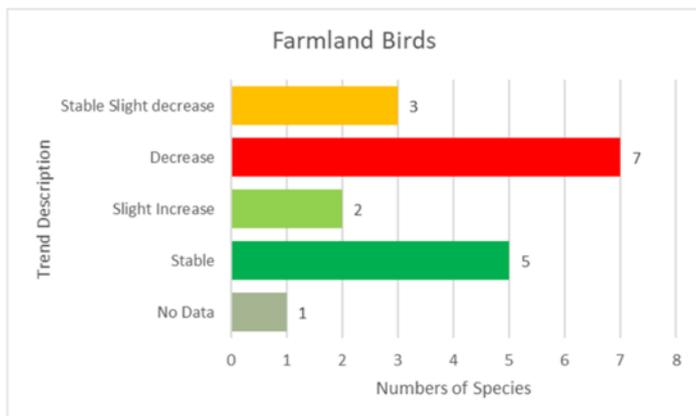


Chart 15: Guiding Statement Trends for Farmland Birds

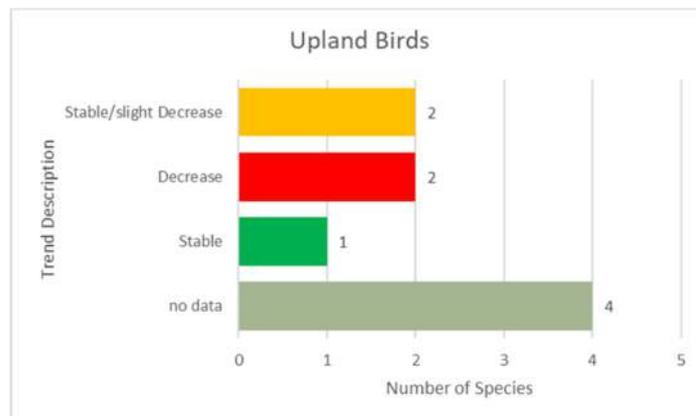


Chart 16: Guiding Statement Trends for Upland Birds

- 55 The Birds of Durham paints a similar picture of declines, notably with Farmland birds where twelve of the eighteen species are in decline. Uplands birds are generally seen as currently stable, but three species have historically declined with no evidence of a recovery.
- 56 The Atlas trend statements are worse for Woodland Birds and Urban and Garden Birds with no evidence of population increases recorded in the Atlas and all the species for which data is available indicating some level of decline.

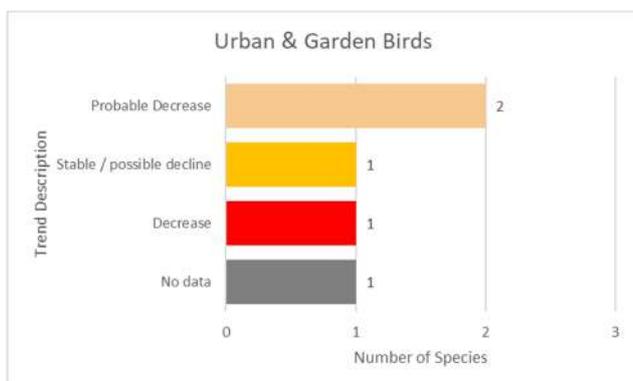


Chart 17: Guiding Statement Trends for Urban and Garden Birds



Chart 18: Guiding Statement Trends for Woodland and Scrub Birds

- 57 Again, the Birds of Durham aligns with the trend statements within the Atlas with three of the five Urban and Garden birds showing evidence of declines. Five of the nine Woodland & Scrub species are regarded as showing evidence of declines in The Birds of Durham.
- 58 The State of the UK's Birds Report (2020) by the British Trust for Ornithology provides trends for Woodland and Farmland Birds. The

farmland bird index has declined by 45% since the 1970's and the woodland bird index by 27% in the same period.

- 59 Information from the two Durham bird publications provides evidence that we were following the national declines up to 2012, there seems to be no reason to suspect that this situation has radically changed over the preceding years. The 2020 BTO report states that “*The farmland indicator continues to decline, despite widespread uptake of agri-environment schemes and other bespoke conservation initiatives*” and this statement is more than likely to apply at a local level.

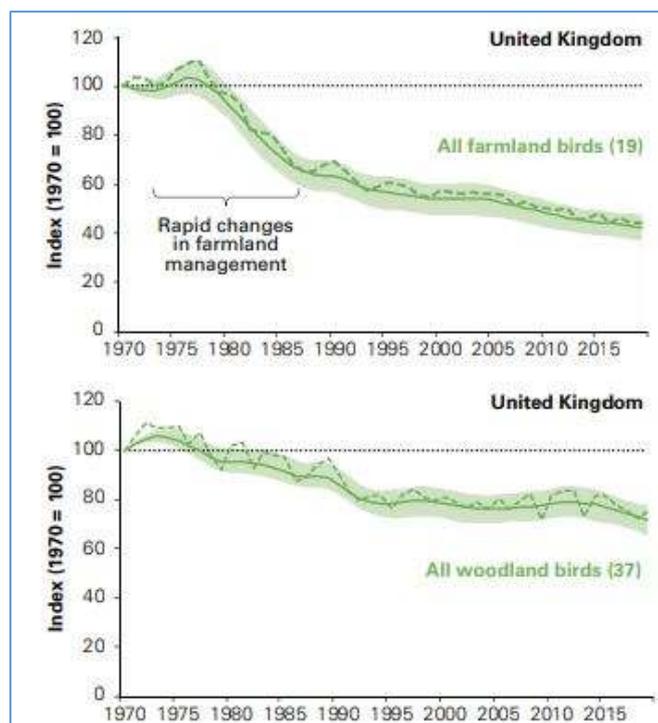


Chart 19: Farmland and Woodland Bird Index Change - State of the UK's Birds Report (2020)

Mammals and Herptiles

- 60 There are 25 mammals and herptiles listed on the DBAP and the Mammals, Amphibians and Reptiles of the North East (2012) provides the most recent published information on these species.
- 61 The atlas states that all the reptile species are “*declining in the region*” and that our only DBAP listed amphibian, the great crested newt, had undergone a decline since the 1980's. Statements or information extracted from the Atlas for reptiles and amphibians is shown in the table below:

Grass Snake	“Decline and possibly heading to extinction”
Great Crested Newt	20% decline between 1984 and date of publication

Adder	Some evidence of reduction in distribution
Common Lizard	“Considerable decline in lowland distribution”
Slow Worm	Some evidence of reduction in distribution

Table 1: Reptiles and Amphibians

62 The County Reptile Recorder was contacted (January 2022) for an opinion on the current state of our herptile fauna; they believe that there is no evidence of a recovery in our reptile species and that they may still be in decline. There have been no Grass snake records for five years and they are almost certainly now extinct and that great crested newts might be stable but have not recovered from the declines noted in the 2012 Atlas. The County Recorder thinks that coastal slow worm populations are the most likely future population loss.

63 This picture of declines is also evident at a national level with all the species resident in County Durham regarded as in ‘general decline’ across the UK other than the adder which is reported as declining in some areas. The grass snake which is likely extinct in County Durham is regarded as in general decline nationally (BTO Research Report 572).

64 There are 20 species of mammal listed on the DBAP of which 9 are species of bat. The Atlas is unable to provide clear population or distribution trends for most of the species due to a lack of data; the Atlas provides clear information on declines or increases in population or distribution for only five species.

65 Within living memory, the otter, water vole and red squirrel have declined or are still declining. The otter became virtually extinct in Durham during the 1960’s and 1970’s due to pollutants and adverse riparian management; fortunately, this situation has been reversed and otters have recolonised the County. The water vole and red squirrel have undergone significant declines and there is little, if any, evidence of any reversal in their fortunes. Two other species, the pine marten and polecat suffered near extinction in the late 1800’s / early 1900’s and remain elusive to this day.

66 Statements or information extracted from the Atlas for mammals is shown in the table below:

Otter	Significant decline in 1960/70’s; now returned to former distribution
Pine Marten	Functionally extinct since late 1800’s.

Polecat	Extinct in the early 1900's. Evidence of a limited return to the area
Red Squirrel	1953 survey stated that the species had "declined of late years". Lost from east Durham in early 2000's
Water Vole	Lost from approx. 90% of range (late 1990's). Further 30% loss (2006 to 2015)

Table 2: Mammals

67 The State of Nature Report provides information on changes in the abundance and distribution of mammals across the UK. Over the short term, the indicator for abundance remained stable, just 3% lower in 2016 compared to 2006 while the distribution indicator shows long term decreases of 26% over the long term and a 6% decrease over the short term. The lack of time series data informing the local Atlas means that it is difficult to compare the local and national pictures; but only one of the three species that we can show to have declined in our lifetimes has recovered. The water vole and red squirrel continue to be of concern in 2022 despite conservation efforts spanning decades.

Butterflies

68 The Atlas of the Butterflies of North East England was published in 2014 and provides information on the 7 DBAP listed butterflies within County Durham. Butterflies have been relatively well recorded, with natural historians producing accounts of local butterflies since the late 1800s and Dunn and Parrack publishing *The Moths and Butterflies of Northumberland and Durham* in 1986.

69 Of the seven DBAP species five have clearly undergone declines up to 2014. The remaining two species are both hairstreaks and are regarded as under-recorded making any determination of declines difficult, although it is thought that the White-letter hairstreak may have been in decline since the mid 2000's.

70 Statements or information extracted from the Atlas and other publications for all DBAP butterflies are shown in the table below:

Northern Brown Argus	Two distinct colonies (inland and coastal). Two inland sites have been lost.
Dingy Skipper	A 2005 survey indicated a 30% loss of known sites

Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary	Formally found across the county, with significant declines in the early 1900's. Increasing due to introductions and active management, but distribution still limited as of 2021.
Dark Green Fritillary	Once common, but declined in the 1960/70's. Now recovering and spreading but distribution still limited as of 2021.
Grayling	Noted as extinct by Dunn and Parrack (1986). Previously present along the Durham coast. No confirmed ⁹ Durham records as of 2021 but might be possible that a recolonisation is slowing occurring.
White-letter hairstreak	Increase up to 2006 (probably due to recording effort), potential decline since 2006. Regarded as under-recorded.
Green Hairstreak	A rare species, increase in distribution since 1986 (probably due to recording effort).

Table 3: Butterflies

- 71 Since the 2014 Atlas was written, targeted conservation action has continued to be directed toward the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Dark Green Fritillary. These two species have shown limited recoveries, with Dark Green Fritillary becoming increasingly common where good quality habitat is present.
- 72 The Dingy Skipper survey was repeated in 2016, albeit involving fewer sites, but the rate of loss was almost identical to that shown by the previous work referenced in the Atlas.
- 73 Butterflies are one of the species groups exhibiting alarming declines at a national level with the State of Nature Report reporting recent declines of 12% in abundance and habitat specialist butterflies showing a decline of 68% between 1976 and 2018.
- 74 This national pattern of declines amongst specialist species chimes with the local data, all five DBAP species which we can show have declined are habitat specialists with only White-letter hairstreak being a species of the wider countryside. A decline in specialist butterflies can be seen as a reflection on the state of our semi-natural habitats as discussed with regards to SSSI and LWS, as without the habitats to support them, species declines are inevitable.

⁹ A few records from Murton and a singleton from Hawthorn, but the reliability of these records is in doubt. Surveys at Murton and in 2021 at Hawthorn did not find the species.

Bumblebees

- 75 The most recent Atlas is that for the bumblebees, which was published in 2019. There is a long history of bumblebee recording in County Durham with information from the early 1800's and active recorders in the early 1900s through to the modern day.
- 76 Since 1827 there have been 22 species of bumblebee recorded in County Durham, currently there are 18 extant species, 23% of our bumblebee historical fauna is either locally extinct or has significantly declined.
- 77 Statements or information extracted from the Atlas for bumblebees are shown in the table below:

Great yellow bumblebee	Extinct (last recorded in 1970)
Red shanked carder bee	Extinct (last recorded in 1979)
Large garden bumblebee	Extinct (last recorded in 1926)
Shrill carder bee	Extinct (last recorded in 1926)
Moss carder bee	Significant reduction in distribution, lost from the lowlands by the 1970's although still present in upper Weardale and Teesdale.
Red-tailed Cuckoo Bee	Formerly rare, increasing across the County

Table 4: Bumblebees

- 78 At a national level bumblebee species have declined over the past century. Two species became extinct in the UK during the 1900's with Cullum's bumblebee last seen on the Berkshire Downs in 1941 and the Short-haired bumblebee last seen at Dungeness in 1988 and officially declared extinct in 2000.
- 79 The concerns over the national status of bumblebee have led to seven species being listed as UK Priority Species, of which five have been recorded in County Durham, of these five, four are now extinct and one has undergone a significant reduction in distribution.
- 80 Most bumblebees are not habitat specialists but are dependent on permanent flower-rich grasslands that they need to forage in. The loss of hay meadows and wildflower meadows especially in the lowlands is a major cause of declines and the likely explanation for the losses in the

local area. Despite some positive news, bumblebee populations in County Durham have clearly undergone declines that mirror the national picture and the drivers for these declines are likely the same.

Salmon and Sea Trout

- 81 The Environment Agency monitors salmon and sea trout numbers passing the fish counters at Framwellgate on the River Wear and at the Tees Barrage on the lower reaches of the River Tees. Data is available up to 2021.
- 82 The data for both rivers indicate a decline in salmonids recorded moving through the Wear and Tees catchments. The trend for the River Tees is more marked than for the Wear, where increases in fish counts have been noted up until the 2010's when numbers started to decline.

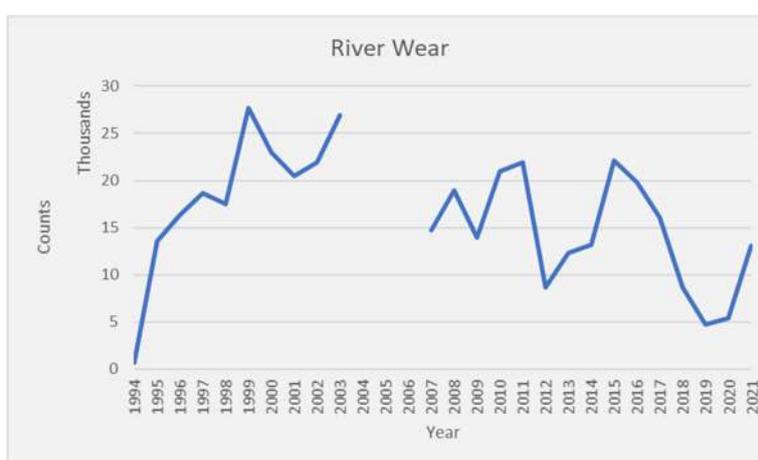


Chart 20: Fish counts (River Wear)

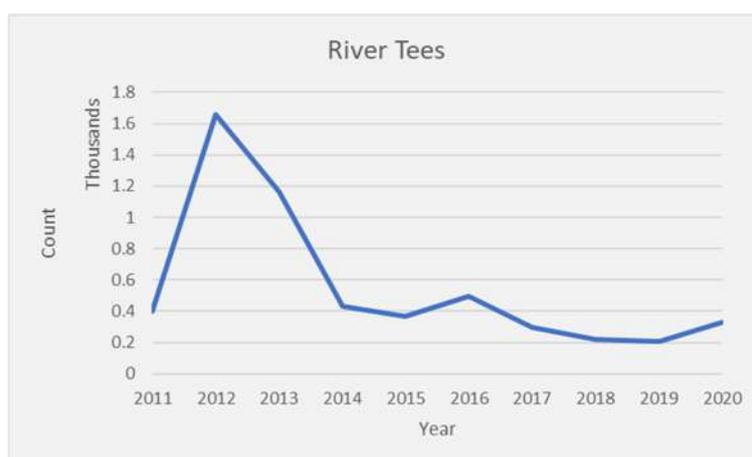


Chart 21: Fish Counts (River Tees)

- 83 The concerns raised by the fish count data are reinforced by Environment Agency compliance assessments for the Rivers Wear and Tees against the management objective for salmon stocks.

- 84 The EA places rivers in risk categories of not meeting the management objectives, the categories range from 'not at risk' in the current year i.e., having a high probability ($p \geq 95\%$) of achieving the management objective to 'at risk' i.e. having a low probability ($p \leq 5\%$) of achieving the objective.
- 85 Data relating to the risk categories of rivers across the country has been reported in 'Salmon Stocks and Fisheries in England and Wales in 2020' and is shown in the table below:

Year	River Wear (Risk Category)	River Tees (Risk Category)
2008	Not at risk	At risk
2009	Not at risk	At risk
2010	Not at risk	At risk
2011	Not at risk	At risk
2012	Not at risk	At risk
2013	Not at risk	At risk
2014	Probably not at risk	At risk
2016	Probably not at risk	At risk
2020	Probably not at risk	At risk
		At risk
2025 (predicted)	Probably at risk	At risk

Table 5: Risk of not meeting Management Objectives – Rivers Wear and Tees

- 86 The River Tees has fallen into the 'at risk' category since 2008 and is not predicted to meet its management objectives in 2025. While the River Wear was 'not at risk' for many years its risk of failing management objectives is increasing and predicted to further decline.
- 87 The national picture can be summed up in a statement from the 2020 report - "*The latest assessment therefore indicates that most salmon stocks in England and Wales remain in a depleted state*". The local picture with regards to salmon appears to be in line with the 2020 report's assessment of the national status of stocks.

Summary

- 88 The local data for our terrestrial and aquatic habitats clearly shows that across-the-board semi-natural habitats are failing to meet condition assessments and targets: 85% of SSSIs are in unfavourable condition, 70% of LWS compartments are failing condition assessments, 90.6% of surface waters are failing to meet the required standards and the risks of failure to meet management objective for salmon on our rivers are increasing.
- 89 Other than the Water Framework Directive data for surface waters, which shows continuing failures since 2015 the remaining habitat data provides a snapshot of condition rather than a time series. Despite this gap in the data, our semi-natural habitats are clearly under significant pressure, and this represents a substantial impact on our biodiversity. If our habitats are in poor condition and being gradually lost due to lack of, or inappropriate management then it follows that our species will also be negatively impacted upon.
- 90 Although our species data does not allow trends to be produced over the same time periods as used by the State of Nature Report all the local evidence, across the species groups, points to the conclusion that declines comparable with the global and national picture are occurring in County Durham. The national picture of declines for Priority Species is echoed at a local level within all the Atlases and more recent anecdotal and survey evidence supports the interpretation provided by these publications.

Ecological Emergency

- 91 The question of whether to declare an Ecological Emergency begins with the ESCOC deciding whether to make a recommendation to Cabinet that a declaration should be made, and if so, the form it should take.
- 92 If the ESCOC makes a recommendation for declaration, then the Climate Change Emergency provides a proven framework for any response to the Ecological Emergency. The Climate Emergency Action Plan consists of two parts: one for the council's target and one for the countywide target. If an Ecological Emergency follows the same blueprint, then the ESCOC should be made aware of the developing Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS); this strategy is a statutory requirement of the Environment Act 2021 and provides a strategic framework that will help drive action and investment to help nature and wider nature-based environmental benefits.

- 93 A LNRS will consist of
- A Statement of Biodiversity Priorities: priorities for biodiversity outcomes, and the actions that need to be undertaken to achieve these outcomes.
 - A Local Habitat Map: existing distribution of habitats and areas already important for biodiversity, overlaid by locations considered suitable for delivering the outcomes and actions.
- 94 The LNRS could form the 'countywide' section of any Ecological Emergency with the Council partially satisfying its commitment to an Ecological Emergency by supporting the production of a LNRS and delivery of its targets and actions.
- 95 This would leave the production of an Action Plan for the council's targets. The priority would be a cross service review to identify and describe the measures and changes that might be made to benefit biodiversity.

Conclusion

- 96 Members have already received information at the special meeting on the 13 December, showing the decline in habitats and various species across the county. The information previously provided has been further added to by this report and accompanying presentation together with the views of key partners on biodiversity decline across the County.
- 97 It is anticipated that the information provided to members will allow them to determine as to whether they recommend to Cabinet that DCC declares an Ecological Emergency.

Background papers

- [Living Planet Index 2020](#)
- [State of Nature Report 2019](#)

Contact: Stuart Priestley

03000 267135

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Not applicable

Finance

Not applicable

Consultation

Not applicable

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable

Human Rights

Not applicable

Climate Change

The decline in biodiversity is detailed in the report.

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

Staffing

Not applicable

Accommodation

Not applicable

Risk

Not applicable

Procurement

Not applicable